

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH ANNOUNCES HANTAVIRUS DISEASE DEATH**

(Richmond, Va.)—The Virginia Department of Health announced today that a man from the New River Health District in Southwest Virginia has died from Hantavirus disease. The man died last week after being hospitalized for pneumonia. Laboratory tests were conducted at the Division of Consolidated Laboratory Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). VDH received confirmation of Hantavirus from CDC Wednesday afternoon. Only one other case of Hantavirus disease has been reported in Virginia. That case occurred in 1993.

“Our sympathy goes out to this man’s family and colleagues at such a difficult time,” said State Health Commissioner, Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H. “This is a very rare and unexpected event.”

The man was a Virginia Tech student and had recently been conducting field studies of small mammals in West Virginia. Health officials believe that he was most likely exposed to the virus through contact with the urine, feces or saliva of these animals. Hantavirus disease is not transmitted from person to person and there does not appear to be an ongoing risk to public health.

Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS) disease is a rare but extremely serious illness of the lungs caused by a family of viruses known as Hantavirus. Persons who have exposure to wild rodents or rodent-infested areas are at highest risk of getting HPS. The virus, which is found in the animal's urine, droppings and saliva, gets in the air as mist or dust when droppings or nests are stirred up and can be spread to humans who inhale the virus.

Hantavirus can also be transmitted by handling rodents or by touching your nose or mouth after handling contaminated materials. A rodent's bite can also spread the virus. There is no evidence that cats, dogs, farm animals, or insects transmit the disease to humans. You cannot get HPS from another person.

The initial symptoms are fever (101-104F), fatigue, and muscle aches. Other common symptoms that may occur are headache, dizziness, chills, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal pain. Later symptoms of HPS are coughing and shortness of breath caused by fluid build-up in the lungs. These breathing problems start 4-10 days after the first symptoms and can progress to respiratory failure and sometimes death. At the present time, there is no specific treatment for HPS.

“Cases of Hantavirus disease are rare, but people should always take precautions when coming in contact with rodents,” stressed Stroube.

VDH offers the following advice for preventing infection from Hantavirus:

**In the Home and Yard**

- Keep your home clean to discourage rodents: wash dishes promptly, clean counters and floors, put pet food and water away at night, store food and garbage in containers with tight lids.
- Prevent mice from entering your house by sealing all openings with caulking or steel wool. Remember rodents can squeeze through holes as small as a dime.

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- Follow these precautions before cleaning up a dead rodent or an area where mice have been: Wear rubber or plastic gloves. Don't stir up and breathe dust. If you are going into a building, garage or basement that has been closed, open it to air out for at least one hour before spending time inside. Wet down dusty areas that may be contaminated with rodent droppings or urine *before* cleaning them up. You can use a commercial disinfectant or prepare a solution of 1 1/2 cups bleach to 1 gallon of water. Use a spray bottle to mist the area and *gently* but thoroughly wet it. A hard spray will just stir up more dust. Wipe up any debris; do not use a broom or vacuum cleaner because they create dust in the air. Dead rodents should be sprayed with disinfectant and then placed in two plastic bags containing enough disinfectant to thoroughly wet the carcasses. When cleanup is complete, seal the bag and place into a second plastic bag before disposing by burying or burning. Before removing gloves, wash gloved hands in disinfectant and then in soap and water. Thoroughly wash hands with soap and water after removing gloves.
- Control mice outside your house: clear brush and grass away from the foundation, place woodpiles and garbage cans on platforms at least 12 inches off the ground and keep them at least 100 feet from the house, haul away junk that can provide homes for rodents.

### **When Camping or Hiking**

- Avoid coming into contact with rodents and rodent burrows or disturbing dens (such as pack rat nests).
- Avoid sleeping on bare ground. In shelters, use a mat or elevated cot if available. Use tents with floors or a ground cloth if sleeping in the open air. Store foods in rodent-proof containers and promptly discard, bury or burn all garbage.
- Use only bottled water or water that has been disinfected by filtration, boiling, chlorination, or iodination for drinking, cooking, washing dishes, and brushing teeth.
- And last but not least, do not play with or handle any rodents that show up at the camping or hiking site, even if they appear friendly.

For more information on Hantavirus disease go the VDH Web site at [www.vdh.virginia.gov](http://www.vdh.virginia.gov) or visit the CDC Web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hanta/hps/noframes/prevent.htm>.

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